



**Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing:
February 17, 2022
Governor's Proposed Budget for Office of Early Childhood Funding**

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Senator Hartley, Representative Walker, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Loraine Shea and I am the President and CEO of Easterseals of Greater Waterbury. Easterseals is a not for profit organization that for over 60 years has been an indispensable resource for people and families facing disability. Throughout the Greater Waterbury, Central and Northwest CT communities, we provide a broad network of services including school readiness education, early intervention- Birth to Three Services, rehabilitation services, vocational services and audiology services. We are committed to see that everyone is valued, respected, and accepted. Together, we're empowering people with all abilities and their families to be full and equal participants in their communities.

I am here to testify on behalf of Early Childhood Education/School Readiness and Birth to Three providers who provide critical developmental, educational and child care services to the tiniest and most vulnerable citizens of our State; children from Birth to 5 years old.

Easterseals has been providing these services in various cities and towns throughout Connecticut for over 20 years. During the pandemic our employees were providing these services on the front lines, nimbly readjusting how we deliver these services safely, preventing children from losing ground on developmental milestones and providing necessary child care so that parents (many of who are essential workers) could get to work.

Last year when the budget was passed, the Appropriations Committee included a 4% increase for Non-Profit Providers of essential services. We are more than grateful for that and thank you tremendously. Unfortunately, the Non- Profit Providers that contract with the Office of Early Childhood, did not receive that 4% increase.

Providers of School Readiness Education have not seen a rate increase since 2015. In 2015 the minimum wage in Connecticut was \$9.00 per hour. In a few short months the minimum wage will increase to \$14.00. That is an increase of approximately 55%. First and most importantly, we should not be paying our employees minimum wage! They are educated teaching professionals who work in nationally accredited programs. However, with no rate increases, it has been nearly impossible to recruit and retain staff and keep up with operational costs of salaries, benefits, facilities, technology and supplies. We are at a crisis point.

Birth to Three Providers have not seen a rate increase since 2017. The same argument applies. The cost to deliver quality services is simply not reimbursed by the State with whom we contract.

We need your help now. The Governor's budget simply does not reflect what the State of Connecticut values. Children and families depend on these services which are in a crisis situation. Please vote to increase rates for services provided through the Office of Early Childhood.

Thank you for your continued service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Loraine C. Shea". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Loraine C. Shea,
President and CEO
Easterseals Greater Waterbury